

in the United States where a minimum wage worker, paying 30 percent of his or her income for housing, could afford a one-bedroom apartment.

As for the government rent subsidies aimed at alleviating the hardship of low-income tenants, those too have shrunk.

The war on terror and the war in Iraq have pushed them off the agenda.

Today parts of Renter-World constitute a desperation sector of America. Poor people, crammed into too-small apartments, struggle to pay for food, rent, transportation, and medical care.

To paraphrase Linda Loman, lamenting the plight of her husband, Willy, in "Death of a Salesman": "Attention must be paid" to these renters.

The reason is pragmatic.

In the past, Renter-World has been a gateway to Owner-World. Low-income workers, renting for a few years, have saved up enough for the downpayment on a house, and, with scrimping, have kept up with mortgage payments. But today's renters cannot so easily make that leap. The Big Box shelver, married to the fast food waitress, may want the American dream. They may have left family thousands of miles away to seize the dream. But without some housing relief, they will never leave Renter-World.

And the promise of America, the dream for millions of Americans, is to leave Renter-World. That first mortgage—often the first mortgage for a family—constitutes step one in the economic mobility we value. High rents trap families, anchoring them on the bottom rung of the ladder that we want them to climb.

For the sake of the renters, and of the nation as a whole, Uncle Sam must pay attention to Renter-World.

TRIBUTE TO THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BURLINGTON BRISTOL BRIDGE

HON. JIM SAXTON

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Burlington Bristol Bridge as it turns 75 years old. The Burlington Bristol Bridge (1931–2006) is a vital transportation asset to the residents of South Jersey, connecting New Jersey to Pennsylvania.

The bridge replaced a ferry service which carried passengers across the Delaware River to Burlington, Bristol and the amusement park on Burlington Island. Bridge construction commenced on April 28, 1930, and was completed one year later, for a total cost of approximately \$1.5 million.

This landmark bridge stretches 2,301 feet from abutment to abutment, and is 20 feet in width, with one lane in each direction.

For many years after its construction, the bridge's lift span at 540 feet was the longest movable span ever built. It is a vertical "Lift" type of movable bridge, which raises regularly to allow large vessels to pass beneath.

Approximately 27,000 vehicles per day, or 9.9 million vehicles annually traverse it.

This man-made wonder has faithfully served the residents of South Jersey and Pennsylvania for three-quarters of a century, and will continue to do so for many more years. Its contributions to travelers and the citizens of South Jersey are hereby recognized.

INTRODUCTION OF THE "PROTECTING AMERICAN'S MINERS ACT"

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Since the beginning of this year, we have witnessed numerous accidents in our Nation's underground mines. So far this year, 26 underground coal miners have died, more than the total for all of last year. Preliminary investigative reports and public hearings have made it clear that prompt action is necessary if we are to avoid a continued loss of life and disruptions to a vital American energy source.

For many months, I have been urging the Committee on Education and the Workforce to take action on this matter by marking up the legislation introduced by the West Virginia delegation. Sadly, that has not occurred. While the Senate is making progress on this matter in a bipartisan manner, the responsible leaders in this body have declined to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves. The Administration, which helped create the problem by withdrawing regulatory initiatives that could have saved lives and moving enforcement resources into compliance assistance, is likewise lacking in purpose and direction in addressing this crisis.

Accordingly, today I rise to introduce new mine safety legislation, together with Congressman RAHALL of West Virginia, Congressman OWENS of New York, Congressman CHANDLER of Kentucky, Congressman HOLT of New Jersey, Congressman ARTUR DAVIS of Alabama, and Congressman MOLLOHAN of West Virginia. This legislation does not detract in any way from our continued pleas to this body to move forward with the West Virginia bill. It does, however, include refinements and new provisions based upon what we have learned since that bill was introduced. An identical bill is being introduced in the Senate by Senators KENNEDY, ROCKEFELLER, MURRAY and DURBIN, and we understand the refinements and new provisions reflected in this legislation are under active discussion in the responsible Senate committee. We hope that these new ideas will advance the discussion and lead to prompt action by this body. We will not let up on this, nor will we let complacency take root.

Following is a detailed section-by-section discussion of the new bill, entitled the "Protecting America's Miners Act." I encourage all of my colleagues to join me in support of this legislation, and in demanding action by this body before new tragedies strike.

SUMMARY OF PROTECTING AMERICA'S MINERAL ACT

(1) Short Title. "Protecting America's Miners Act".

(2) Sense of Congress. This legislation is necessary because of the failure by the current Administration to protect miners and properly prepare for the future.

(3) Definitions. Relevant definitions from the Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 are incorporated into this free-standing legislation.

(4) Improved escape and refuge requirements to help protect miners in the event of an emergency.

This section would establish improved safety standards to help underground coal

miners survive an underground emergency. Highlights include—

Requiring atmospheric detection and warning systems to alert miners to dangerous levels of harmful and explosive gases;

Requiring two-way messaging systems to communicate between miners and the surface once they are available; in the interim, one-way messaging systems and backup telephone lines would be required;

Requiring caches of self-rescuers for escape, and, until such time as the mine has established underground refuges, also requiring special caches to support prolonged stays underground;

Requiring underground refuges, meeting criteria based on past experience in the U.S. and abroad, to protect miners unable to escape from a mine; and

Requiring miners to be equipped with tracking devices to facilitate rescue.

The bill authorizes MSHA to revise these standards by regulation in order to improve them over time. This is the approach taken in 1977 when the current Mine Act was established. Similarly, MSHA is authorized to issue modifications of these standards for individual mines as with any safety standard under the requirements of existing law. Additional research on related topics is required by section 11 of the bill.

Because of the nature of these requirements, the bill would make any violation of them an "imminent danger" so that MSHA can act promptly to ensure mines are in compliance.

SECTION 5—FACILITATING THE PROMPT INITIATION OF RESCUE AND MINE RECOVERY EFFORTS

The bill would set up an Emergency Call Center to be sure MSHA is ready to receive information on emergencies—so callers don't find themselves going from answering machine to answering machine. The Call Center would have to be supplied by the Secretary with home and emergency numbers for key agency personnel, local emergency services, mine rescue teams, and others.

The bill would require that operators notify MSHA within 15 minutes of any emergency or serious incident. The bill ensures MSHA gets prompt notice of close calls, not just situations in which there are deaths or serious injuries.

The bill would separate mines into two categories for purposes of what mine rescue team requirements are applicable:

Those mines with less than 36 employees can contract out for mine rescue services to the nearest mines which maintain such teams, provided that: (1) the mine must include some of its own employees in the rescue team; (2) all rescue team members must be able to reach the mine within 1 hour; and (3) the operator must hold at least two rescue drills a year to ensure the team becomes familiar with the mine.

Those mines with 36 or more employees must have their own mine rescue teams (although they could contract for additional teams). These mines must also hold at least two rescue drills a year.

The bill would also require the Secretary to promptly initiate an expedited rule-making to revise existing mine rescue team requirements, and to consult broadly with existing mine rescue teams, other rescue organizations, local and State emergency authorities and others in this regard. The rules would cover training and qualifications for rescue team members, the equipment and technology used in rescue, the structure and organization of mine rescue teams, and other factors which have been identified by mine rescue team members at recent public hearings as posing problems during recent rescue efforts. Section 11 of the bill contains related research requirements.